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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9630

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1572

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6991

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5450

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6500

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001034

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KJUS KDEM ASEC TH

SUBJECT: THAI PRIME MINISTER LIFTS STATE OF EMERGENCY,
DISCUSSES SECRETARY CLINTON VISIT AND RECONCILIATION

REF: A. BANGKOK 983 (ABHISIT BRIEFS AMBASSADORS)

¶B. BANGKOK 982 (SONDHI SHOT)

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Classified By: Charge a.i. James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) The RTG at mid-day April 24 rescinded the state of emergency that had existed in Bangkok since April 12. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, meeting with Charge and visiting civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, said he hoped that Secretary Clinton would be able to sign an instrument for U.S. accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation during her planned July visit to Thailand, and that she might have a bilateral U.S.-Thai program after participating in ASEAN events. Abhisit said he intended to address the legitimate grievances of anti-government protestors, and he envisioned a process of reconciliation lasting approximately one year -- implying that he might in 2010 dissolve parliament in order that Thailand could hold a new legislative election. A special April 22-23 legislative session intended to promote reconciliation focused primarily on divergent claims about the actions of protestors and security forces in mid-April demonstrations in Bangkok.

¶2. (C) Comment: The recision of the state of emergency may partially ease lingering tension between the government and anti-government activists but may also facilitate a resumption of redshirt protests in Bangkok in the near future. Redshirt organizers had previously announced they would hold demonstrations on April 25 in a neighboring province. We have no indication that a new round of demonstrations would necessarily be disorderly, but the red-shirt movement is currently lacking in experienced protest management. Prominent 1976 student leader and disenfranchised Thai Rak Thai executive Chaturon Chaiseng was scorching in his criticism to us April 24 of the performance of Thaksin and UDD leaders in the recent protests, saying that Thaksin had greatly erred by placing himself at the center of the rallies and had pushed the rallies too far, and that none of UDD leaders had the experience to keep the rallies focused on core messages or sufficient situational awareness when events started to spin out of control April 12-13. End Summary and Comment.

STATE OF EMERGENCY LIFTED

¶13. (SBU) In a televised appearance, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva announced at mid-day April 24 that the RTG had formally lifted the state of emergency for Bangkok and surrounding provinces, effective as of noon. As of the afternoon of April 24, media reports indicated that uniformed security officials who had been guarding key areas in Bangkok were withdrawing from their positions. It is unclear whether protest leaders in police custody will be released imminently; banned TRT executive Chaturon told us mid-day that the detained leaders likely would need to petition for another court hearing to seek bail.

ABHISIT DISCUSSES SECRETARY CLINTON VISIT

¶14. (C) Charge and visiting civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, Sr. called on Abhisit on the morning of April 24. Discussing the U.S.-Thai bilateral relationship, Abhisit said he had heard that Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya had a productive meeting with Secretary Clinton in Washington April ¶123. Abhisit said he looked forward to the Secretary joining the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and ASEAN Regional Forum in Thailand in July. The visit would have a positive impact on U.S.-ASEAN relations. He welcomed the USG's expressions of interest in acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and said he hoped that the Secretary in July would be able to sign an instrument for U.S. accession. Abhisit also said he hoped that the Secretary would be able to spare time for a bilateral U.S.-Thai program, following the ASEAN events. Abhisit noted that Thailand and the U.S. have had "good humanitarian cooperation over the past four years" after the 2004 tsunami and Cyclone Nargis, and expressed hope that it

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would continue.

RECONCILIATION AND INQUIRY

¶15. (C) Responding to a series of inquiries by Rev. Jackson about political conditions in Thailand, the protests, and the chances for reconciliation, PM Abhisit explained that the House of Representatives and the Senate had just held a joint session intended to promote reconciliation. Abhisit viewed this as a starting point for dialogue between the government and its opponents. He noted the House and Senate would convene a working group to conduct an "inquiry" into the RTG's response to recent demonstrations. Abhisit pledged that his administration would review its actions in a transparent manner and seek to address the legitimate complaints of the demonstrators.

¶16. (C) Previewing for Jackson his imminent revision of the state of emergency in Bangkok, PM Abhisit emphasized that he had imposed the state of emergency April 12 solely to restore order, not to advance a political agenda. He acknowledged that anti-government protestors might resume demonstrations, but he believed this could happen without violence. Jackson welcomed Abhisit's decision to rescind the state of emergency.

¶17. (C) PM Abhisit explained to Jackson that the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD, also commonly termed "redshirts") was a large movement with no clear structure. Most UDD supporters did not favor violence, but they were pushed in that direction by certain leaders (NFI). When the protests turned violent, the number of participants shrank dramatically. Abhisit believed that successful efforts by the government to address the concerns of Thailand's rural population could help to prevent further violence.

¶18. (C) PM Abhisit acknowledged that some Thais had a legitimate basis for feeling a sense of social injustice, and it would be appropriate to try to remedy some concerns about the political system by amending the constitution. Abhisit

also indicated he was open to calls for an amnesty for political figures disenfranchised by Constitutional Court rulings, but it was important to distinguish between sanctions imposed for inappropriate political acts and those tied to criminal offenses, including corruption. (Comment: This statement appeared to signal that, as he has indicated previously, Abhisit would not consider a full amnesty for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. End Comment.)

¶19. (C) In terms of a time frame for a process of reconciliation, Abhisit said it might take close to one year for tempers to cool. During that period, the RTG had to focus also on its international commitments (such as hosting international meetings in its capacity as ASEAN Chair) and on revitalizing the nation's economy. Abhisit implied that he had a vague plan to dissolve the parliament sometime in 2010 (after Thailand would complete its term as ASEAN Chair), to enable Thailand to hold a new legislative election.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

¶10. (C) Jackson raised the recent shooting in Bangkok of media mogul and People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) leader Sondhi Limthongkul (ref B). Abhisit said he understood that Sondhi was recovering well from his injuries and intended to hold a press conference on April 27. Sondhi viewed the assassination attempt as an effort to provoke Sondhi's supporters into reacting violently against the UDD or other supporters of Thaksin, according to Abhisit. Sondhi was privately advising his associates not to "fall into that trap," Abhisit said.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, WITHOUT CLEAR WINNERS

¶11. (C) Abhisit's meeting with Charge and Jackson followed a joint House and Senate session April 22-23 intended to promote reconciliation. Abhisit appeared to have hoped to use the event to discuss ways to address political concerns. He had recently called for political parties to submit

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proposals for constitutional amendment, and he reiterated that call during the session.

¶12. (C) Predictably, however, the session degenerated into divergent "he said, she said" accounts of the events of April 11-14. Abhisit used the session to defend the RTG's actions during the recent demonstrations (along lines similar to what we have reported -- see ref A); members of the Puea Thai (opposition) party accused the RTG of excessive use of force. Both sides used photographs and video clips to bolster their claims. One Puea Thai MP even brought in a car wheel bearing bullet holes, but contrary to what was rumored before the session, no Puea Thai MP attempted to bring a demonstrator's corpse to the parliament. Although some (primarily Senators) sought to address larger issues of political reform, the claims and attempted rebuttals about actions during UDD riots dominated the discourse. In the judgment of some objective observers, neither side's presentation clearly prevailed over the other's.

¶13. (C) Abhisit also used his time at the joint session to denounce some statements that had appeared in the international press. He condemned as untrue and harmful Thaksin's claim to the Financial Times that Privy Councilors had informed King Bhumibol in advance of the 2006 coup d'etat. Abhisit also condemned the veiled threat of fugitive UDD co-leader Jakrapob Penkair, who recently told the BBC that "the room for unarmed and non-violent means to resolve Thailand's problem is getting smaller every day." Prominent Puea Thai MP and co-leader of the UDD Jatuporn Prompan also rejected the tone of Jakrapob's remarks, saying that his supporters would not/not use violence.

ENTWISTLE